

# **Rural Socio-Economic Resilience from a Gender Perspective: The Role of Labor Market Attachment**

*Debora Pricila Birgier and Carlos Tapia*

## **Abstract**

This paper investigates rural socio-economic resilience through a gender lens by examining how labor market attachment differs by gender and urbanization level across Europe. Women in rural areas face unique challenges—including limited access to resources, fewer employment opportunities, and heavier burdens of unpaid care—that potentially undermine both their personal well-being and the broader resilience of rural communities. By leveraging data from the European Union Labor Force Survey (EU-LFS) spanning multiple time points, the study examines how the intersection of gender and geography shapes labor market outcomes such as employment, part-time work prevalence, and employment constraints due to caregiving responsibilities. In addition, it examines how welfare typology in Europe shapes this gender and rural intersection.

## **Background and Motivation**

Recent debates on rural socio-economic resilience have underscored that resilience is not solely about economic competitiveness but also about the capacity of communities to adapt in the face of change (Davoudi et al., 2012; Martin, 2012). Although resilience has traditionally been discussed in terms of GDP or employment (Briguglio et al., 2006; Sensier et al., 2016), the human and social dimensions—in particular, gender relations—might play a pivotal role. The relationship between gender and resilience remains underexplored (Martini & Platania, 2022). While gender equality is recognized in economic growth literature, its role in resilience frameworks is often overlooked. In rural regions, entrenched traditional gender roles often place women at a disadvantage, sometimes confining them to unpaid care work or precarious employment (Bock, 2015; de Pryck & Termine, 2014; Luca et al., 2023). By incorporating a gender perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that challenges conventional views of rural resilience, emphasizing that both employment outcomes and the ability to adapt to structural changes are deeply gendered. Urbanization is posited as a potentially disruptive force that may challenge traditional gender norms. In urban settings, where opportunities and progressive gender ideologies are more prevalent, women may experience higher labor force participation (Evans, 2019). In contrast, rural areas often maintain conservative norms, potentially widening gender disparities (Bock, 2015; de Pryck & Termine, 2014). Thus, the central research question is twofold: How does the intersection between gender and urbanization influence labor market attachment in Europe? And how do welfare state typologies moderate these interactions?

The literature on gender and rurality highlights how traditional roles confine women to unpaid caregiving and low-wage employment, limiting their financial independence and constraining community resilience (Bock, 2015; de Pryck & Termine, 2014; Luca et al., 2023). Yet, there is a growing recognition that urbanization may alter these dynamics by exposing individuals to more egalitarian gender norms (Evans, 2019). Welfare state theories further suggest that national institutional frameworks—through policies related to childcare, education, and social security—can mitigate or exacerbate the disadvantages faced by women (Chauvel & Bar-Haim, 2016; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Schröder, 2013). Thus, the study adopts an intersectional approach by considering both the direct effects of gender and rurality, while also comparing outcomes across different European welfare regimes (Continental, Nordic, Southern, and Eastern European).

## **Data and Methodology**

The empirical analysis draws on the EU-LFS, using data from three time points (2013, 2018, and 2023) to capture temporal trends in labor market outcomes across 30 European countries. The sample is restricted to individuals in their prime working ages (25–64) to ensure that the analysis focuses on economically active populations.

Three primary dependent variables are examined:

1. **Employment Status:** A binary indicator distinguishing between employed individuals and those unemployed or inactive.
2. **Part-Time Employment:** Among the employed, the study measures the prevalence of part-time work based on self-reported data.
3. **Care Responsibilities:** An indicator derived from responses on whether employment is limited by caregiving duties. Although this variable registers a relatively low overall percentage, it offers insight into the gendered constraints on work.

The core independent variables are gender and degree of urbanization (DEGURBA). The DEGURBA variable categorizes areas into three groups: densely populated cities, intermediate-density towns/suburbs, and thinly populated rural areas. For the purpose of analysis, the primary focus is on comparing rural areas with urban areas. In addition, the study controls for demographic characteristics (age, parental status, and education level) as well as migration status, recognizing that these factors influence labor market participation.

To analyze the data, the study employs logistic regression models with each one of the dependent variables presented above. The main variables of interest are gender and degree of urbanization, and the interaction term captures how the combined effect of gender and rurality shapes labor market outcomes. The models are run for each country and each year, and the predicted probabilities are subsequently used to visualize both the “gender gap” (the difference in outcomes between men and women in rural areas) and the “rurality gap” (the difference between outcomes for rural versus urban women).

## Results

The empirical findings reveal how each one of the labor market outcomes (employment, part-time employment and caregiving responsibilities) of men and women change by rurality levels and how these are shaped by the different European welfare regimes.

### Employment Outcomes:

The analysis reveals that the average gender employment gap in rural areas across Europe is approximately 11%, indicating that women in these regions are generally less likely to be employed than men. However, substantial cross-country variation exists. In countries such as Italy, Spain, and Poland, both gender and rurality gaps are pronounced, suggesting that rural women face compounded disadvantages. Conversely, Austria, Germany, and Belgium exhibit relatively small gender disparities alongside a rural employment advantage for women, where employment rates of women in rural areas are comparable to or exceed those in urban areas.

A temporal analysis indicates a slight reduction in the gender employment gap, decreasing from 11.9% to 10.9% over the examined period, reflecting gradual progress in some regions. However, the persistence of these disparities, particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe, underscores enduring structural challenges. Additionally, welfare classifications significantly explain women’s employment

patterns in rural and urban areas. In Continental and Nordic countries, rural women generally have higher employment rates than their urban counterparts, though the disparity is less pronounced in Nordic nations. In contrast, Southern European countries exhibit significant rural gender employment gaps, with little improvement over time. Eastern European countries also display substantial gender disparities, with rural women generally at a disadvantage compared to those in urban areas.

Finally, the counterfactual analysis—comparing rural and urban gender gaps as well as rurality gaps for men—underscores that while rurality may offer employment advantages for men in many countries, it does not translate into similar benefits for women.

### **Part-Time Employment Patterns:**

When focusing on part-time employment, the study finds a pronounced gender effect. Women, especially in rural areas of Continental countries, are significantly more likely to work part-time compared to men. For example, in countries such as the Netherlands and Austria, the predicted probability for rural women to engage in part-time work is considerably higher than for their urban counterparts or for rural men. In Nordic countries, while part-time work remains more common among women, the gender gap is less stark, and the differences between urban and rural areas are minimal. In Southern Europe, the influence of urbanization on part-time work is less pronounced, suggesting that once women secure employment, the likelihood of part-time versus full-time work does not vary substantially by rurality.

### **Caregiving Responsibilities:**

The study also examines whether caregiving responsibilities contribute to the observed employment patterns. Although only a small percentage of respondents report that care duties limit their employment prospects, the size of these responsibilities is non-negligible in certain contexts. In Continental countries, women in rural areas report higher levels of employment constraints due to caregiving, with gender gaps that are noticeably larger than in urban areas. This contrasts with Nordic, Southern, and Eastern European countries, where the effect of caregiving on employment is less differentiated by rurality. These findings suggest that while caregiving responsibilities are an important factor in some contexts, other structural issues—such as job availability and entrenched gender norms—might be more decisive in shaping the rural labor market for women.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study examines the relationship between gender, rurality, and labor market dynamics, highlighting the persistent disadvantages faced by rural women. While gender disparities in economic participation are well-documented, their link to rural resilience remains underexplored. Traditional family structures, conservative gender norms, and limited access to employment and social services continue to constrain women's economic opportunities in rural areas. Moreover, migration patterns suggest that many rural women leave their communities due to dissatisfaction with job prospects, education, and healthcare access. The findings highlight three key dimensions of gendered labor market inequalities in rural and urban areas.

First, gender gaps in employment persist across Europe, with rural disadvantages varying significantly. In some regions, particularly Continental and Nordic countries, rural women have higher employment rates than urban women. In Southern and Eastern Europe, rural women face substantial employment barriers. Over time, rural employment gaps have narrowed in some regions, especially Southern Europe.

Second, part-time employment patterns show stark differences in gendered labor market experiences. Rural women in Continental and Nordic countries are more likely to work part-time, reinforcing traditional gender roles. This trend is pronounced in the Netherlands and Austria, where welfare policies might support part-time work. In Southern and Eastern Europe, structural labor market constraints play a greater role in limiting rural women's employment.

Third, caregiving responsibilities significantly influence women's labor market participation, particularly in Continental Europe. Rural women in these countries report greater employment constraints due to caregiving. In Southern and Eastern Europe, broader economic and social factors play a more significant role in employment disparities.

Addressing these disparities requires a comprehensive policy approach that integrates gender-sensitive measures into rural development strategies. Investments in childcare, flexible work arrangements, and education opportunities are essential for fostering greater gender equality and economic resilience in rural areas. Future research should investigate the mechanisms driving these disparities and evaluate the effectiveness of gender-sensitive policies.

- Bock, B. B. (2015). Gender mainstreaming and rural development policy; the trivialisation of rural gender issues. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 22(5), 731–745.
- Briguglio, L., Cordina, G., Farrugia, N., & Vella, S. (2006). Conceptualising and measuring economic resilience. In S. Chand (Ed.), *Pacific Islands Regional Integration and Governance* (pp. 26–49). ANU Press.
- Chauvel, L., & Bar-Haim, E. (2016). *Varieties of capitalism (VoC) and varieties of distributions (VoD): How welfare regimes affect the pre-and post-transfer shapes of inequalities?* LIS Working Paper Series.
- Davoudi, S., Shaw, K., Haider, L. J., Quinlan, A. E., Peterson, G. D., Wilkinson, C., Fünfgeld, H., McEvoy, D., Porter, L., & Davoudi, S. (2012). Resilience: A Bridging Concept or a Dead End? “Reframing” Resilience: Challenges for Planning Theory and Practice Interacting Traps: Resilience Assessment of a Pasture Management System in Northern Afghanistan Urban Resilience: What Does it Mean in Planning Practice? Resilience as a Useful Concept for Climate Change Adaptation? The Politics of Resilience for Planning: A Cautionary Note. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13(2), 299–333.
- de Pryck, J. D., & Termine, P. (2014). Gender Inequalities in Rural Labor Markets. In A. R. Quisumbing, R. Meinzen-Dick, T. L. Raney, A. Croppenstedt, J. A. Behrman, & A. Peterman (Eds.), *Gender in Agriculture: Closing the Knowledge Gap* (pp. 343–370). Springer Netherlands.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Polity Press.
- Evans, A. (2019). How Cities Erode Gender Inequality: A New Theory and Evidence from Cambodia. *Gender & Society*, 33(6), 961–984.
- Luca, D., Terrero-Davila, J., Stein, J., & Lee, N. (2023). Progressive cities: Urban–rural polarisation of social values and economic development around the world. *Urban Studies*, 60(12), 2329–2350.
- Martin, R. (2012). Regional economic resilience, hysteresis and recessionary shocks. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 12(1), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbr019>
- Schröder, M. (2013). *Integrating Varieties of Capitalism and Welfare State Research: A Unified Typology of Capitalisms*. Springer.
- Sensier, M., Bristow, G., & Healy, A. (2016). Measuring Regional Economic Resilience across Europe: Operationalizing a complex concept. *Spatial Economic Analysis*, 11(2), 128–151.